

EPA- NOAA Partnership on Coastal Community Growth

The US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) are working together to address the impacts of growth and development on coastal communities, economies and natural resources. This partnership creates efficiencies by leveraging the assets of each agency, providing a consistent message and new approaches from the federal government, and ensuring that both agencies are coordinating to address one of the most critical issues in achieving both Agency's missions.

Populations in coastal watersheds are growing rapidly, with 55 percent of the U.S. population already living within 50 miles of a coast. The environmental impacts of development directly affect the ability of communities to balance natural resource protection with economic growth. The pressures of coastal growth also profoundly affect the ability of NOAA and EPA to achieve national goals for sustainable management of coastal resources and protection of human health and the environment. This challenge was highlighted in the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy's September 2004 report: *"The pressures of continuing growth are acutely felt in coastal areas. While largely attributable to activities taking place at the coast, some pressures originate hundreds of miles away in inland watersheds."*

States and local governments have direct authority over land use and development decisions. Many communities are already moving strongly to address the challenges created by the impacts of current development patterns and practices. Communities are protecting critical watershed areas, adopting environmentally friendly development practices, strategically designating areas for future growth, and reducing pressure on undeveloped land by revitalizing brownfields and existing communities. The Ocean Commission report recognises the importance of these efforts, recommending that: *"The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and other appropriate entities should increase assistance and outreach to provide decision makers with the knowledge and tools needed to make sound land use decisions that protect coastal water quality."*

EPA and NOAA have responded to that recommendation by creating a formal partnership to support state and local development innovations. Testing and adopting new growth strategies is challenging, particularly for communities that are busy responding to daily incoming development proposals. The EPA-NOAA Partnership will address their need for resources, research, information, training, best practices, and technical assistance by providing:

- training for local government staff and officials;
- citizen workshops in cooperation with local governments;
- a clearinghouse of policies, ordinances, and initiatives;
- assessments of local development rules and policies; and,
- access to development "swat teams" to work on locally identified issues.

The scope of activities under this partnership has been formalized through a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between the EPA and NOAA, and the development of a statement of work. The MOA broadly specifies the roles of each agency and the statement of work details the projects the partnership will undertake.